

Community Alert: Kratom



Kratom is a tropical tree native to Southeast Asia with leaves that contain compounds that can have psychotropic (mind-altering effects). Kratom is not currently an illegal substance in Massachusetts and is easy to order on the internet as well as local stores. Most people take kratom as a pill, capsule, or extract. Some people chew kratom leaves or brew the dried or powdered leaves as a tea or blend with their coffee, shakes or smoothies. Sometimes the leaves are smoked or eaten in food.

Concerns with Kratom

How Kratom Affects the Brain

Kratom can cause effects similar to both opioids and stimulants. Two main compounds in kratom leaves, *mitragynine* and *7- α -hydroxymitragynine*, interact with opioid receptors in the brain, producing sedation, pleasure, and decreased pain. Mitragynine also interacts with other receptor systems in the brain to produce stimulant effects.

Effects

Depending on what strain of kratom is taken and how much, it can result in a variety of reactions from being a stimulant to a sedative.

Claims

Kratom claims to be a non-addictive substance and that you cannot overdose on kratom. Both claims have been proven false.

Hidden Ingredients: Buyer Beware

Some kratom products have been tested to have other substances mixed in, often unknown to the buyer. These include diphenhydramine (an antihistamine), alcohol, caffeine, benzodiazepines, THC, fentanyl, and cocaine. Two deaths were reported following exposure from kratom alone with no other reported substances. Some products have been tested to contain salmonella bacteria.



Kratom capsules purchased in North Reading.

Is kratom addictive? Like other substances, kratom can cause dependence, which means users will feel physical withdrawal symptoms when they stop taking the drug. Some users have reported becoming addicted to kratom. Six states and several additional cities have banned kratom over concerns for its potential for addiction. Withdrawal symptoms include: muscle aches, insomnia, irritability, hostility, aggression, emotional change, runny nose, and/or jerky movements.

Contact North Reading Mental Health/Substance Abuse Clinician Laura Miranda AT (978)357-5038 or email lmiranda@nrpd.org if you're concerned about any addiction.

Potential physical side effects:

- Weight loss
- Dry mouth
- Chills, nausea and vomiting
- Changes in urine and constipation
- Liver damage
- Muscle pain
- Psychosis
- Potential death

Potential nervous system side effects:

- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Hallucinations and delusion
- Depression and delusion
- Breathing suppression
- Seizure
- Coma

How do I recognize

kratom? Kratom looks like fresh or dried leaves and can be made into a green or off-white powder, liquid extract, gum, or pill. Packaging varies. There may not be manufacturing information, company information, or production location. If a package does include this information, it does not make it more safe.



Kratom products purchased in North Reading.

The product to the right had 54 capsules in the package, not 65 as noted.

Quick Facts

Fact: A 2019 paper analyzing data from the National Poison Data System found that between 2011-2017 there were 11 deaths associated with kratom exposure. Nine of the 11 deaths reported in this study involved kratom plus other drugs and medicines. More cases (through 2020) are being investigated.

Fact: The DEA lists kratom as a drug of concern.

Fact: According to the FDA, kratom should not be used to treat any medical conditions, nor should it be used as an alternative to prescription opioids.

Fact: There are currently no FDA-approved therapeutic uses of kratom and the FDA has evidence to show that there are significant safety issues associated with its use.

Fact: At one time, some researchers believed that kratom might be a safe alternative to opioids and other prescription pain medications. However, studies on the effects of kratom have identified many safety concerns and no clear benefits.



Sources : National Institute on Drug Abuse; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Mayo Clinic; Kratom: Unsafe and ineffective (June, 2020). U.S. Food and Drug Administration; FDA oversees destruction and recall of kratom products; and reiterates its concerns on risks associated with this opioid (February 21, 2018). The Very Well Mind; What to Know About Kratom Use (November 9, 2020). American Kratom Association: Protecting Kratom for Americans (www.protectkratom.org). DrugFree.org "Six States Ban Kratom Over Concerns About Addiction Potential" (May, 2016).